

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at Saint John Baptist Church in Columbia, South Carolina
January 28, 2024

The President. Hello, hello, hello. Please, sit—thank you.

Thanks for bringing me home. [*Laughter*]

Audience members. Yeah!

The President. Oh, you all think I'm kidding.

For the longest time, when I was a young public defender and a United States Senator, I went to—if you'll excuse me—an AME church—I apologize—[*laughter*]—with Reverend Beaman.

You brought it all back, Rev.

Saint John Baptist Church Senior Pastor Jamey O. Graham, Sr. Amen. [*Laughter*]

The President. I'll tell you what, the man can preach, can't he? [*Applause*]

To the whole congregation, I'm genuinely honored to be here. I sincerely mean that.

And I'm especially honored to have one of your own working with me, your former mayor running things for me in Washington, DC. And he was baptized here and married here.

And A'ja Williams [Wilson; White House correction] is from here. [*Laughter*] Can that woman play basketball. Whoa. That's the only reason I was coming. I thought she was here. [*Laughter*]

I'm only joking. I know she's not. I'm going to get in trouble with my wife if I keep fooling around. [*Laughter*]

But I want to thank Steve for his friendship and his leadership.

You know, it's a covenant we have with each other that comes from a—from the commands of scripture: "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy mind and all thy soul. Love thy neighbor as thyself." Easy to say, but really hard to do. Easy to say, but hard to do.

But in those commands is the essence of the gospel, is the essence of what I believe to be the American promise. And I mean that sincerely.

You know, we're unique in all the world—America. We're the only country that is formed not based on ethnicity, based on geography—based on an idea—an idea—and I mean this sincerely—the only country in the world. An idea we've never lived up to, but we've never walked away from, that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights"—life, liberty, et cetera.

It's an idea that we can't abandon. And some want to see it abandoned.

In my life, I've tried to walk my faith. Like I said—I was kidding with Jim—I'd always go to 7:30 Mass at St. Joe's, which is a—a church built—a Catholic church built by indentured servants—Irish servants working for the DuPont family. It's kind of—kind of—it always kind of made me angry.

The heads—the cornerstone of the church, 1848, says, "Built for our Catholics." I never figured we were "their" Catholics. But any rate—but all kidding aside, then I'd go to 10:30

Mass—10:30 service at—with Reverend Beaman and—during the civil rights era, when I was working hard as a young man and as a public defender.

And you know, you said it, Rev. My mother would say: "You've got to be who you say you are. You've got to do what you say you're going to do. Just get up. Just get up." And that's what I've tried to do: tried to walk the—my walk of faith.

But here's what I learned, as many of you might have learned as well: We're all imperfect beings—all of us. And we don't know where fate is going to take us or when it's going to take us. It can, like many of you—and me—snatch an entire family from your grip with an accident.

But we can do our best to seek the light and the hope and love. You know, from where I come from, that's the power of faith. That's the power of faith. That's the power, as I was saying to the Rev outside when we—when—before he invited me in, that's what the Black Church has done for American—Black Americans for their—I mean, imagine what would have happened if there had been no Black Church all those periods of darkness.

Well, you give us a mountaintop. You give us a promised land. You give us a dream and a faith that we shall overcome, we can overcome. You know, and you push us toward a more perfect Union—you really do—to bend the arc of the moral universe toward justice together. And what a gift to the Nation and the world you've been.

Your prayers mean everything. And they're—we've—in my church, we've taken the 22d Psalm and turned it into a hymn, basically. It says: "May He raise you up on eagle's wings and bear you on the breath of dawn, make the light to shine on—upon you. And until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hand."

That's my wish for all of you.

Thank you for being so good to me. I appreciate it very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:13 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Sylvester S. Beaman, Chair, President's Advisory Council on African Diaspora Engagement, in his former capacity as pastor of the Bethel AME Church in Wilmington, DE; Director of the Office of Public Engagement Stephen K. Benjamin, in his former capacity as mayor of Columbia, SC; A'ja Wilson, center, Women's National Basketball Association's Las Vegas Aces; and Rep. James E. Clyburn.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Saint John Baptist Church in Columbia, SC.

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